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Too Much Criticism

Some Americans are carrying criticism of the Central Intelligence Agency a bit too far. The attacks, which are now sporadic and probably harmless, could mushroom into a movement to do away with the vast information-gathering organization or at least to render its operations ineffective.

The latest and most vicious assault has been made by a group of New England college professors and writers in a half-page ad in the New York Times. The group charges that the CIA "blundered in an inexcusable and almost inconceivable way" in the Cuban affair. It scores the agency for, of all things, acting in secrecy. As if an intelligence agency, which by its very nature is secret, could perform its delicate tasks any other way!

The most voluminous criticism of the CIA previously was that precipitated by the Powers U-2 flight on the eve of last year's Eisenhower-Khrushchev meeting in Paris. Then the agency was accused of being so secret that not even the President knew what it was up to.

But in both cases, a great deal is not known about the CIA's side of the argument. The necessary secrecy in which the organization must work has prevented it from offering a convincing defense of itself.

Two things are worth noting, however. One is that in both the U-2 and the Cuban cases, the President assumed full blame for the decision causing the trouble. There has been a growing acceptance of the possibility that President Eisenhower did, as Soviet Premier Khrushchev claimed, approve not only of the U-2 flights in general but the specific one that landed Spy Pilot Powers in Russian hands. The factors behind this and the Cuban decision by President Kennedy constitute the missing evidence without which the public can't pass judgment fairly.

The other thing to be noted is that, strange as it may seem, Comrade Khrushchev likes the CIA even less—judging from his frequent outbursts against it—than do some of its American critics. It is interesting, too, though not necessarily significant, that many of the policies suggested for the United States by its CIA critics also happen to coincide with those suggested by Comrade Khrushchev.